

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 4, 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate  
The Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20004

The Honorable Paul Ryan  
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives  
The Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Speaker Ryan:

The problems the American people confront do not disappear simply because Congress does. In the case of the rapidly expanding Zika crisis, the problem has grown significantly worse since the Republican-led Congress went on recess. We urge you to immediately cancel the remainder of the congressional recess and get back to work to help the American public, especially women and families, amidst this crisis.

In Puerto Rico, the Zika virus is now expanding at an accelerating rate, according to public health officials. Each day, thousands of residents, including up to 50 pregnant women, are infected. According to the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there are now nearly 5,500 confirmed infections in Puerto Rico, with likely many times that number of unconfirmed cases. Zika could impact as many as 10,000 pregnancies by the end of the year. Experts fear a generation of children born with severe birth defects, such as microcephaly, caused by Zika.

In the continental United States, what public health officials warned for months was imminent is now a reality: Zika is spreading here. In Florida, 15 individuals – that we know of – have been infected by mosquito bites while residing in the state. According to an estimate cited by CDC Director Dr. Tom Frieden, the cost of treating a single case of microcephaly in a newborn could be as high as \$10 million over a lifetime. At present, more than 850 pregnant women in the U.S. and its territories have Zika.

While the Zika crisis grows, the Republican-led Congress has done nothing on funding. It has been 164 days since the President requested emergency funding to fight Zika. The combined time it took Congress to fund all of the last three public health emergencies – Ebola, H1N1 and Avian flu – was 137 days. The National Institutes of Health has said trials for a Zika vaccine will likely be delayed due to lack of funding. It is deeply troubling that the Zika epidemic which disproportionately impacts pregnant women and their babies would be treated any differently than these other emergencies. In each of these instances, Congress was able to set aside political


rhetoric and act quickly to help. Unfortunately, we have seen no such action on Zika for pregnant women and families.


As you know, Congress left for the August recess after House Republicans killed a bipartisan compromise bill that received 89 votes in the Senate. Republican leadership acquiesced to their extreme right-wing Members, who demanded poison pill special-interest priorities that weakened clean water rules, supported the Confederate flag and limited access to family planning services by once again attacking Planned Parenthood.

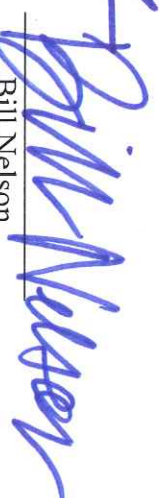
The World Health Organization, the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American Academy of Pediatrics, the March of Dimes, and the CDC have all called for greater access to birth control in Zika-impacted countries. Planned Parenthood affiliated clinics in Puerto Rico offered contraceptive services to 88,000 women and men last year, almost half of which went to those under 25 years old. Family planning services and access to contraception are primary tools to help combat Zika. By preventing these clinics from helping women at risk of contracting Zika, Republicans are limiting protection for Puerto Rican women in order to score cheap political points on women's health.

It is simply unacceptable that efforts to counter the spread of Zika and develop a vaccine are being held hostage by Republican partisanship. Americans expect Congress to do its job. Republican Congressional leaders should call both the Senate and the House back into session to pass a real and serious response to the burgeoning Zika crisis. The simplest course of action would be to pass the Senate's clean bipartisan compromise on Zika funding by unanimous consent and have the House pass the same bill immediately.


Sincerely,

  
Patty Murray  
United States Senator

  
Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator

  
Bill Nelson  
United States Senator


  
Harry Reid  
United States Senator


  
Charles E. Schumer  
United States Senator

  
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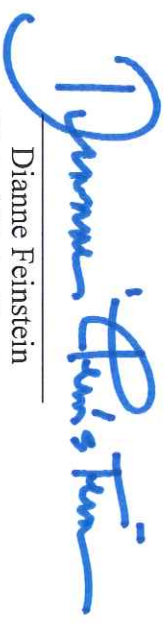
  
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Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
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Dianne Feinstein  
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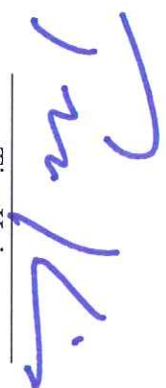
  
Al Franken  
United States Senator

  
Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

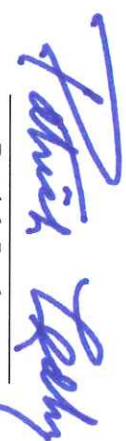
  
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Heidi Heitkamp  
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Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator

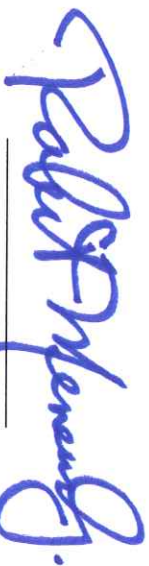
  
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Amy Klobuchar  
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Bernard Sanders  
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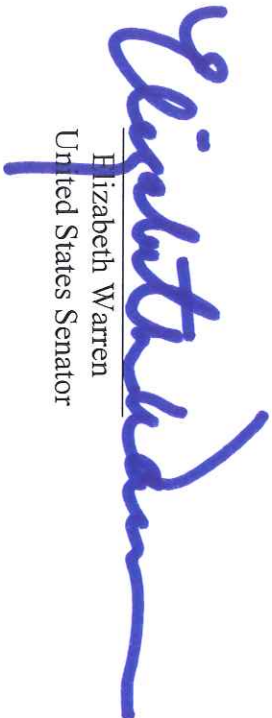
  
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